

WILLIAM SHATNER: RIDING THE ENTERPRISE ONCE MORE

*An Interview
With Star
of 'Star Trek'
And 'Hooker'*

By Ellen Kozak

ACTOR William Shatner is a man of many moods. The morning after he first saw a screening of **Star Trek III: The Search For Spock**, he was mellow.

Looking tanned and fit in his L.C.P.D. uniform, he met with a small group of journalists in a darkened screening room at the Burbank studios, during his **T. J. Hooker** lunch break. He brought a sandwich with him, asked that he be forgiven for eating it while fielding questions, then never unwrapped it. "I'm finding that what my mother said is true," he commented later. "You can't eat and talk with your mouth full."

Shatner was extremely gracious to the journalists, as, indeed, he had been with a similar group the morning after the first screening of **Star Trek II: The Wrath Of Khan**. This was a marked contrast to his aloof stance at the post-screening party the night before, which had rankled some of the fans present — contest winners who had been flown in from all over North America and wanted a chance to meet their hero. The next day, as he happily autographed photos for members of the press, Shatner apologized for his behaviour the night before, explaining, "if you sign one autograph, you have to sign them all".

Obviously satisfied with his performance in **Star Trek III**, the man who plays Admiral Kirk, and who has, on occasion, referred to himself as a Trekkie, discusses the entire Star Trek phenomenon with affection.

"We like to think that in the series there was a level of humanity, of philosophy, if you will, that stood out every so often. And I think that is one of the elements that has made the series popular. The studio had always held back from doing anything (more) with Star Trek because of their reluctance to believe that it could have a viable economic life. Then when Star Wars hit and became the major success it was — I used to joke about driving by Paramount and hearing a shot ring out; somebody committing suicide, having lost the opening opportunity — so 'Star Trek The Motion Picture' was, in my view, an attempt to catch up with Star Wars."

He paused, then — more candidly than he dared two years before — admitted that **Star Trek The Motion Picture** "was not a terrific film. It was a good film, but it was not in the tradition of Star Trek".

Two years earlier, he had tried to make excuses for the first film: "It was an attempt to make a world-shattering, **Star Wars**-competing epic, and everybody tried very hard. Through a series of unfortunate accidents, we lost a lot of time in the production. What the film really lacked was post-production time, previewing time. What is really needed was fifteen minutes of editing and it would have been different."



But Shatner was playing it close to the chest in 1982. Indeed, he even refused to contrast Robert Wise and Nicholas Meyer as directors. "One's grey, the other's got black hair", he stated flatly, cutting off any further questions on the subject. He was far more open two years later, when asked to compare the first two directors with each other and with Leonard Nimoy.

"Robert Wise came to 'Star Trek: The Motion Picture' with a legendary — justifiably legendary — reputation, and when he said put the camera here and we're going to go there, we said 'yes sir!', because one didn't question the father figure who knew all."

It was different with Meyer. "We were so impressed by his creative ability that, although 'Star Trek II: The Wrath Of Khan' was only his second picture, we felt that his imagination should be given full flower. He hadn't directed very much, and whatever help we could give him was proffered, and he would accept it or not, depending on what he felt was right."

Shatner paused before describing his relationship to long-time co-star Leonard Nimoy, when the discussion changed to that of actor and director.

"Leonard and I are dearest of old friends" he said at last, "and we had shared a mutual struggle with management in various things. Whether it was a script, or a concept, or a dressing room, we were always united. We'd had a plan."

Shatner smiled rather ruefully. "We were
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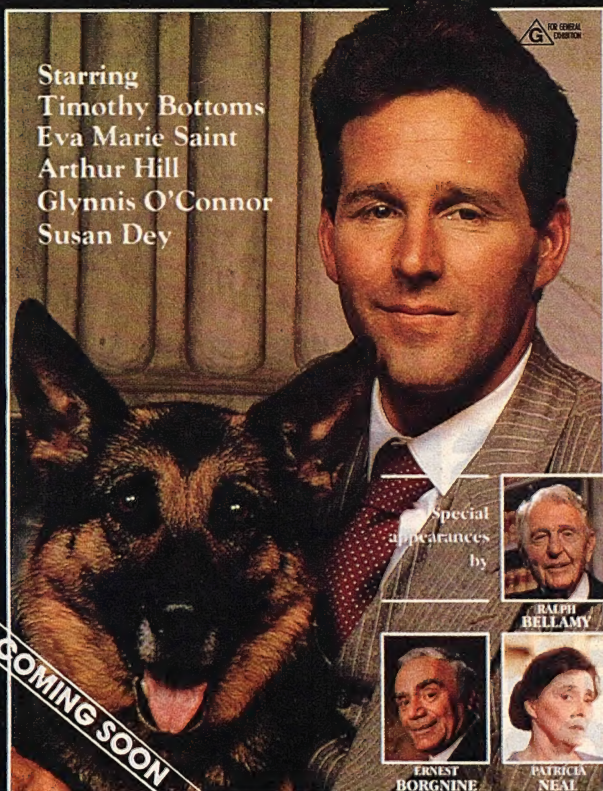
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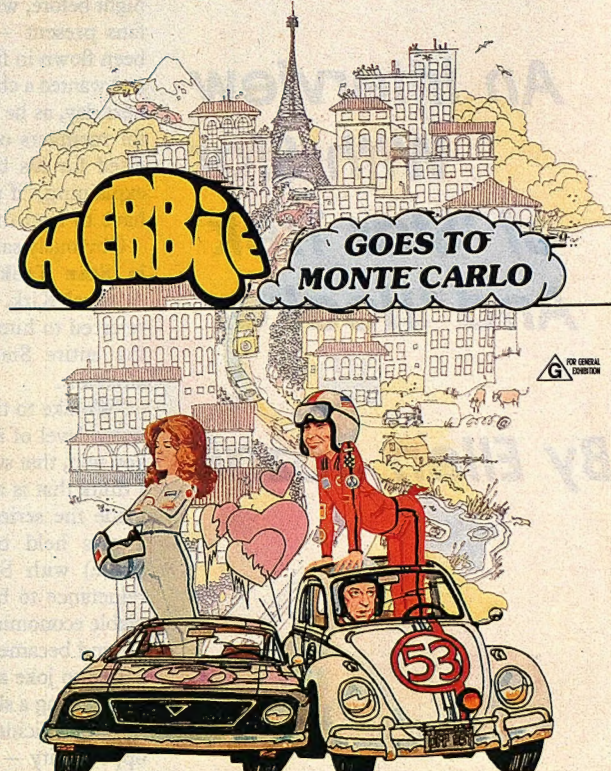
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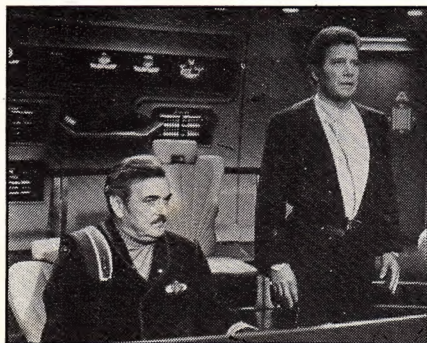
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brothers in flesh and spirit and now, suddenly, my brother was saying 'you should do this', and I felt alone. So there was an awkward period for me. It was more awkward in the beginning than with the other two directors. But that slowly erased itself as I realised that Leonard knew what he was doing, and it became fun and good."

This led Shatner to speculate on how Nimoy had come to direct **Star Trek III: The Search For Spock**. "It's a very natural desire to grow and expand as an artist. He wanted to direct the film and was able to do so extraordinarily well."

Shatner speculated that it was a trade, Nimoy getting to direct if he would continue to play Spock. But when asked if he thought a Star Trek feature could be made without the Vulcan, the man who plays Admiral Kirk stated flatly, "I wouldn't even want to consider it".

"It think that when asked what are the ingredients that makes Star Trek so popular, we still don't have the answer. The science



fiction, the action. The philosophical undertones, the family of players — whatever you point out, we know all the elements, but we still don't know why Star Trek is successful. There is a chemistry to a hit show and to alter it is to alter the possibility that it will be successful. Mr Spock is a major element, so I think it's essential that he be in it."

Two years earlier, Shatner had voiced an understanding of Nimoy's desire to kill-off Spock. "Leonard had expressed a great deal of reluctance about coming back and renewing the whole Spock thing, but he felt differently at the end of *The Wrath Of Khan*. He had such a good time that he changed his mind."

Shatner was then asked if this was the reason for the mind meld, for Spock's command to McCoy to 'remember', which so shapes *Star Trek III*.

"That was an accident, or maybe it wasn't an accident if you believe in them. We were getting ready to do the death scene. Leonard pinched DeForest and he was looking for something — misterioso — and he put his hand on DeForest's face and for some reason, Leonard said 'remember' in a very viable, valid, science-fiction way."

The mention of science fiction brought up another aspect of the film. Shatner was asked whether his own aging process, which had been emphasised in *Star Trek III*, had been

intentionally reversed in *Star Trek II*. He laughed, then noted that there had been a scene with his Ben Franklin glasses in the third film, but it had been cut.

As to his physical appearance, he explained that, 'as we all age, so does Captain Kirk. The idea is not to fight the aging process'.

However, he had come directly to the filming of *Star Trek III* from weeks of shooting *'T. J. Hooker'*. 'Doing a series is really fatiguing,' he noted, describing the eighteen-hour work days and often six days a week. "That's how I went into the film, with that kind of exhaustion, and I could see it on my face. We started with the first scene on the bridge, so the first shot of me, the one that opened the film, is me just coming off *'T. J. Hooker'*, and I looked, to my eyes, haggard and puffy with fatigue."

Shatner was then asked as to why did he seem to grow younger. "The ease of making a film began and I could see myself looking better and better."



Left/Above: Captain Kirk's faithful crew back in 'Star Trek III, The Search For Spock'.

Then there was a week-long break just before the big fight scene with Kruge. Shatner spent it at the beach. "I ran and I swam and I relaxed for the first time in three years. And when I came back, my face, to me, was totally different."

This is unusual candor from the man who admitted, two years earlier, that he had worked very hard at not aging.

"There are different ways of aging", he noted then. "I have friends who've gotten middle-aged paunches, middle-aged skin, middle-aged lethargy." But he had ducked the question of his age, suggesting that the press look it up (he and Nimoy were both born in 1931), and he admitted that he hoped to age "as youthfully as possible".

So it is that he refuses to slow down. Instead he devotes himself to a regimen of physical activity that would exhaust most men half his age. Chief among these activities is what he terms his 'obsession with horses'. He breeds quarter horses for cutting — the manipulation of cattle from horseback, which has become a competitive sport. He also breeds American Saddle Bred horses, and is the owner of Sultan's Great Day, the 1983 world championship two-year-old, who also won the 1984 three-year-old title.

In fact, Shatner admitted that were it not for this press conference, he would normally be spending his lunch hour at the ranch, which is five minutes away from the studio, where he keeps several of his horses.

This is the kind of enthusiasm that one expects from the man who plays James T. Kirk, which perhaps, should come as no surprise, since he has long maintained that "Captain Kirk is very much my own creation".

"I find that acting for films, you start from a truth in yourself, and if you're going to make it any different from other things you're playing, you make choices. *'T. J. Hooker'* is still me. He looks very much like Captain Kirk because they're both me. But what I'm attempting to do with *Hooker* is make angry choices, and with Kirk, it's noble ability. In *'The Brothers Karamazov'* (a film he made early in his career), it was ingenuousness, a man too good for this world, a priest. And so, starting out from those truths that you know — anger or joy — you can make a character."

Does he still enjoy playing Kirk after all these years? "Absolutely. Because the character is different and because he is, in effect, the hero, and heroes are universal."

What does the man who plays James T. Kirk — he always calls him 'Captain Kirk' — see as the future of *Star Trek*?

"Right now, it is totally open-ended. I have two things I'd like to see. I'd like to see some romance and I would like to see some gritty realism — hand held cameras, dirt under the fingernails, real steel, clanging doors." He shrugged, "I guess Harve has a story line in his mind, but he hasn't talked about it."

Of course Shatner likes the idea of sequels — when they're really sequels, not mere attempts to capitalise on previous success. "If the sequel can take the elements of what made the first picture successful and progress them and fulfill them, then I think it's terrific."

It was clear from his comments the morning after he saw the second and third *Star Trek* films that he believed this had been achieved. Though he had commented, after seeing *'Wrath Of Khan'*, that he was only about 85% satisfied with himself on the screen, his mellow mood would tend to indicate that he was happy with both films and is obviously looking forward to *'Star Trek IV'*.

What were the chances that he would direct that one? "That's a difficult question because I'm so tied up here", he said, gesturing towards the *Hooker* set. "But the truth of the matter is that I'd like to" — if the horses and *Hooker* allow him the time. His tone was hopeful.

After lengthy negotiations, it appears that Shatner has finally signed for the latest film. He won't be directing, but rumor has it that he will be the film's central character. ■

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